



New First-Time Freshmen Increasingly See College As a Way to Augment Future Earnings

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New freshmen arrive at Loyola for their first semester with a range of skills, habits, pre-college experiences, and political views. To understand who our students are and how to serve them, we need to know about such characteristics. Many new freshman characteristics have remained steady over at least the last ten years, but others have changed to a meaningful degree.

The HERI CIRP Freshman Survey is a national survey administered annually to new freshmen at participating institutions across the United States. With the exception of 2005, the Freshman Survey has been administered at Loyola every year since the 1980s. The survey is administered in person to new freshmen during the "Discover Loyola" orientations in the summer prior to students' first semester at Loyola, so response rates are higher than for most other student surveys. In 2010, the response rate was 97%.

This report examines several categories of characteristics of new freshmen at Loyola.¹ First, new freshmen reported rated themselves on a variety of characteristics.² Second, they reported on their agreement with a series of statements of political views and values.³ Third, they were asked about the frequency of select academic and intellectual habits over the past year.⁴ The focus of this report is the incoming Fall 2010 freshman class, but it also covers changes over time (from as early as 2001 to 2010). Statistically significant, substantively meaningful changes are indicated in red or blue in the tables (see tables' Notes).

Key findings

Self-ratings

- Of those traits listed on the survey, new freshmen in 2010 most likely to rate themselves as above average in academic ability (86%; see Table 1). They were also very likely to rate themselves above average in their drive to achieve (82%) and their intellectual self-confidence (66%).

¹ A comparison of Loyola and peer institutions will be presented in a forthcoming report.

² Entire response scale includes highest 10%, above average, average, below average, and lowest 10%.

³ Entire response scale includes agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, disagree strongly.

⁴ Entire response scale includes frequently, occasionally, and not at all.

- They also tended to rate themselves as above average in cooperativeness (77%), in ability to discuss and negotiate controversial issues (71%), and in understanding of others (74%).
- Most new freshmen in 2010 also rated themselves quite highly in dealing with different types of people, in ability to see the world from someone else's perspective (78%), in tolerance of others with different beliefs (84%), and in ability to work cooperatively with diverse people (85%).
- The characteristics on which fewer than half of the new freshmen rated themselves as above average were mathematical ability (46%), public speaking (45%), spirituality (41%), computer skills (41%), popularity (39%), and artistic ability (34%).
- There were meaningful changes over time in only two of the listed characteristics. The percentage of students rating themselves as above average in computer skills rose from 31% in 2001 to 41% in 2010, while the percentage rating themselves as above average in spirituality fell from 50% to 41%.

Intellectual habits in past year

- Three-quarters of Loyola's 2010 new freshmen reported having frequently taken notes in class during the past year, while 60% said they had frequently asked questions in class (see Table 2).
- Two-thirds of 2010 new freshmen said they had frequently supported their opinions with logical argument, and 61% said they had frequently sought solutions to problems and explained them to others.
- Fifty-four percent of the 2010 new freshmen had frequently sought feedback on their academic work, while 55% said they had frequently accepted mistakes as part of the learning process.
- Fifty-five percent of the 2010 new freshmen had frequently revised their papers to improve their writing.
- Fifty-one percent said they had frequently sought alternative solutions to problems.
- Only 46% said that in the last year they had frequently evaluated the quality or reliability of the information they received.

- Forty-one percent said they had frequently explored topics on their own when it was not required for a class.
- Only 27% reported frequently looking up scientific research articles and resources.
- From 2007 to 2010, there were no meaningful changes in the percentages of students who had frequently engaged in any of these reported intellectual habits.

Political views and beliefs

- Of those political views listed, new freshmen were most likely to agree somewhat or strongly that the federal government should do more to control pollution (82%) and to control the sale of handguns (74%; see Table 3). Sixty-seven percent agreed that addressing global warming should be a federal priority. Agreement with the statements about handgun control and global warming dropped between the year they were first asked and 2010.
- In 2010, 63% of new freshmen agreed that wealthy people should pay a larger share of taxes than they do now, but only 34% agreed that the federal government should raise taxes to reduce the deficit. These percentages were higher than those in the first year that the questions were asked.
- Two-thirds of the new freshmen agreed that the chief benefit of a college education is that it increases one's earnings; this was an increase from 51% as recently as 2007.
- Fifty-two percent of 2010 new freshmen at Loyola agreed that affirmative action in college admissions should be abolished.
- Agreement that a national health care plan is needed to cover everybody's medical costs decreased from 77% in 2006 to 62% in 2010.

Conclusions

- A (sometimes substantial) majority of new freshmen rate themselves as above average on most of the characteristics listed on the survey. It is not clear, however, to whom the students are comparing themselves. It seems that, because a majority of new freshmen cannot be greater than average compared to all other new Loyola freshmen, they are over-estimating many of their skills and talents. If they are comparing themselves to their high school classmates, however, their self-ratings may be more accurate, assuming that higher "quality" high school graduates are more likely to come to college than those of lower "quality." Unfortunately, the survey question does not specify the reference group with which students should compare themselves.
- New freshmen rate themselves highly on interpersonal skills and ability to relate with different kinds of people and perspectives.
- There was very little change over time in students' self-reported characteristics.
- New freshman reports of the kind of intellectual habits in which they had engaged in the last year may suggest specific types of academic intervention needed. For example, a quarter of the new freshmen had not been frequently taking class notes, while fewer than half had frequently evaluated the quality or reliability of information they received. Absence of such habits is likely to impair students' academic success in college. Even where academic support resources are available to students, however, students need to actively take advantage of them, and many students seem not to see themselves as having such deficits. Such students are unlikely to take advantage of available academic support.
- One change in political views that is particularly relevant to Loyola (and to universities in general) is the increase in the percentage of new freshmen agreeing that the chief benefit of a college education is to increase one's earnings. This probably affects what students want and expect out of their college education.

Table 1 New Freshman Self-reported Characteristics: 2001-10									
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Self-reported characteristics									
<i>% rating self as above average</i>									
Academic ability	83.9	82.9	79.9	82.7	83.0	84.7	84.5	84.9	85.5
Ability to work cooperatively with diverse people	---	---	---	---	---	---	86.7	86.7	85.2
Tolerance of others with different beliefs	---	---	---	---	---	---	84.3	85.1	83.9
Drive to achieve	80.9	77.9	77.5	77.9	81.0	82.7	82.6	81.0	81.9
Ability to see the world from someone else's perspective	---	---	---	---	---	---	76.6	76.6	77.8
Cooperativeness	77.7	74.5	76.3	70.4	76.7	73.9	76.7	79.0	77.1
Understanding of others	77.0	72.1	72.3	71.2	72.7	71.8	72.9	74.7	74.0
Ability to discuss and negotiate controversial issues	---	---	---	---	---	---	73.8	71.5	71.3
Self-confidence (intellectual)	70.0	66.9	63.8	63.2	65.1	65.3	67.4	64.8	65.8
Openness to having my own views challenged	---	---	---	---	---	---	65.1	65.1	65.8
Leadership ability	64.9	65.2	63.1	63.6	64.1	66.8	66.8	65.7	64.8
Writing ability	61.9	58.4	57.3	58.3	60.0	59.9	63.3	60.0	60.3
Self-understanding	64.1	60.4	60.0	55.5	61.5	61.4	60.8	62.2	60.2
Creativity	63.1	63.5	61.1	62.5	58.2	58.5	61.5	58.9	58.4
Emotional health	56.4	53.5	56.0	51.0	53.6	53.6	53.8	54.3	54.7
Self-confidence (social)	57.2	53.1	52.6	52.1	54.9	55.2	54.9	56.6	53.9
Physical health	54.7	50.7	52.2	47.8	49.5	53.0	53.5	51.7	52.8
Mathematical ability	47.7	43.6	39.5	39.6	45.3	44.8	44.4	44.9	45.5
Public speaking ability	46.9	44.5	41.5	40.5	44.7	44.6	44.7	45.3	45.3
Spirituality	49.7	46.8	45.4	42.0	42.0	42.4	39.5	42.0	40.6
Computer skills	31.0	36.0	37.3	31.5	38.3	38.5	37.6	41.7	40.5
Popularity	43.8	38.9	38.9	---	---	---	40.9	37.9	38.9
Artistic ability	35.1	33.3	32.6	35.0	32.7	32.3	35.9	32.3	34.1
Total respondents	1,314	1,443	1,327	1,396	1,814	1,934	2,152	1,920	1,978

Source: CIRP Freshman Survey, 2001-04, 2006-10 (new incoming freshmen only)

Note: Red/blue indicates that there was a statistically significant decrease/increase in the percentage from the first year measured to 2010 and that the decrease/increase was at least 15% and at least ±5 percentage points.

Table 2 Intellectual Habits of New Freshman: 2007-10				
	2007	2008	2009	2010
	%	%	%	%
Intellectual habits in past year				
<i>% frequently</i>				
Take notes during class	---	72.8	75.5	74.7
Support your opinions with a logical argument	70.1	69.1	68.9	66.6
Seek solutions to problems and explain them to others	58.6	59.9	60.9	61.2
Ask questions in class	61.3	60.4	61.9	60.1
Revise your papers to improve your writing	55.4	56.3	53.0	55.3
Accept mistakes as part of the learning process	---	52.9	54.9	54.5
Seek feedback on your academic work	49.2	52.2	54.4	54.2
Seek alternative solutions to a problem	46.1	49.9	48.6	50.5
Evaluate the quality or reliability of information you received	41.4	41.8	44.3	46.1
Take a risk because you feel you have more to gain	42.2	41.1	42.9	43.2
Explore topics on your own, even though it was not required for a class	39.1	40.4	37.2	41.2
Look up scientific research articles and resources	25.8	26.0	26.8	27.3
Total respondents	1,934	2,152	1,920	1,978

Source: CIRP Freshman Survey, 2007-10 (includes new incoming freshmen only)

Note: There were no significant changes from 2007 to 2010 in reported intellectual habits; questions were not asked until 2007.

Table 3 New Freshman Political Views and Beliefs: 2001-10									
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Political views and beliefs									
<i>% agree somewhat or strongly</i>									
The federal government is not doing enough to control environmental pollution	---	---	---	---	86.2	86.3	83.3	---	82.3
The federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns	87.1	85.0	81.7	87.8	82.1	83.4	79.4	---	74.0
Addressing global warming should be a federal priority	---	---	---	---	---	---	79.2	---	67.4
The chief benefit of a college education is that it increases one's earning	---	---	---	---	57.4	50.9	---	---	67.2
Wealthy people should pay a larger share of taxes than they do now	48.8	47.4	51.0	56.9	59.4	59.0	60.4	---	63.3
A national health care plan is needed to cover everybody's medical costs	---	---	---	---	77.3	79.4	72.4	---	62.3
Affirmative action in college admissions should be abolished	47.2	50.9	52.6	50.0	49.8	49.2	53.2	---	52.4
The federal government should raise taxes to reduce the deficit	---	---	---	---	25.1	25.5	26.0	---	34.2
Total respondents	1,314	1,443	1,327	1,396	1,814	1,934	2,152	1,920	1,978

Source: CIRP Freshman Survey, 2001-04, 2006-10 (new incoming freshmen only)

Note: **Red/blue** indicates that there was a statistically significant **decrease/increase** in the percentage from the first year measured to 2010 and that the decrease/increase was at least 15% and at least ± 5 percentage points.